

Five Glossary Definitions from the

ART & SOCIAL JUSTICE WORKING GROUP
VERA LIST CENTER FOR ART AND POLITICS

<http://www.veralistcenter.org/art-and-social-justice/>

Mocksituation

Mockstitution, n. (neologism) similar to the concept of Artificial Institution (see Marina Naprushkina), or para-fictional institution (C. Lambert-Betty, C. Bishop), a mock institution or "Mockstitution" is an informally structured art agency that overtly mimics the name and to some degree the function of larger, more established organizational entities including schools, bureaus, offices, laboratories, leagues, centers, departments, societies, clubs, bogus corporations and institutions. Mockinstitution thrive within the voids left by an increasingly fractured social framework whose coherence is faltering thanks to rampant privatization, economic deregulation, ubiquitous social risk and day-to-day precariousness. Inserting themselves into these deterritorialized spaces, Mockinstitutions typically sport their own ersatz logos, forged mission statements, and fake websites, all the while engaging in a process of self-branding not aimed at niche marketing or product loyalty, but rather at gaining surreptitious entry into media visibility itself. The Yes Men, for example, embody stereotypical business executives with such uncanny precision that they gain access to "real" corporate conferences, press events, and mass media coverage in order to carry out "image correction" on these same business enterprises. Likewise, the Center for Tactical Magic mixes together Wicca paganism and interventionist maneuvers in an effort to bring about "positive social transformation." Curiously, the longer a Mockstitutions manages to operate the more likely its ironic identity will migrate from the sphere of rhetoric to that of logistical necessity, as if the fictional organization was doomed to re-enter the realm of true institutional authority through the "back-door." One question this giddy confusing raises is whether or not a simulated institutin functions as well as, or perhaps even better than, a so-called actual institution? At the same time, the overall spirit of this new, social-interventionist culture reveals a curious similarity at times with the anarcho-entrepreneurial spirit of the broader neo-liberal economy, including a highly plastic sense of collective identity, and a romantic distrust of comprehensive administrative structures (see Participation).

Risk

Risk, n. |risk| rhymes with frisked (as well as pissed); it is the reigning deity of the .01% and stands opposite refuge, an apparently mythical sanctuary once attributed to the benefits of democratic governance. Used as an economic fermenting agent risk inflates the volume of one's personal property while depleting that of one's neighbor. Along with rampant privatization risk rules the ultra-deregulated economy and generally leads to one of two results: either remarkable affluence, or miserable failure. The majority of artists enjoy the second outcome. It is a fate they share with the superfluous majority of semi and under-employed precarious workers who today face the so-called new normal of the "jobless future." Thanks to neoliberal capitalism's radical redistribution of always-pending catastrophe risk has shifted from the collective level of the community, state, nation, or society, downward, towards each increasingly isolated member of the populace. Existential, psychological, and ideological pressures converge within this society of risk whose circumstances Sociologist Ulrich Beck ominously describes as "no longer trust/security, not yet destruction/disaster." Rooted simultaneously in real and fictive dangers this state of risk ranges from the accidental inhalation of invisible toxins or a mutated virus, to government conspiracies, genetically manipulated foods, sudden acts of police violence, or unforeseen terrorist plots. Individual "Being" is redefined by the society of risk as a perpetual state of personal jeopardy, or in philosopher Giorgio Agamben's terms, as "bare life." Nevertheless, this state of unsettled indeterminacy radiates vulnerability in all directions, regardless of entitlement or cultural privilege. On one hand, this makes the unabashed policing of material inequalities essential to maintaining the current debtocracy, with "the winner takes all," as its official anthem. For even as many despise its terms, most willingly heed its injustice as if it were vested with an inviolable legal authority. On the other hand, such extreme risk also gives rise out of sheer necessity to political dissent, sometimes taking on a militant nature, as for example with the Occupy Wall Street protest encampment in in 2011, an early 21st Century "Hooverville" made up of surplus creative laborers turned urban desperados by the 2008 financial collapse several years prior. All of which underscores the fact that without the endless churning processes of capitalism and its constant dematerialization and re-materialization of everything solid and familiar on its centuries-long quest to monetize every nook and corner of life there would be no wave of dissident activists, resentful redundant artists, community cultural advocates, digital media tacticians, anti-police corruption agitators or other socially engaged practitioners who increasingly emerge into light and generate such interesting things as this lexicon that you are now reading. Instead, they would remain, as they have for decades, little more than a "hidden mass," a rag-tag population of cultural phantoms incapable of more than the occasional act of haunting or a brief moment of upheaval. They would essentially remain a type of cultural Dark Matter, (see Dark Matter).

Participation

Participation, v. [pärˈtɪsəˈpɑːʃən] an increasingly popular term, especially amongst socially engaged artists, the term has gained imposing status today thanks in part to a general abhorrence of centralized authority as exemplified by the rise of leaderless political resistance, but also as a result of 21st Century capitalism's total socialization of labor and communication, a process which has vanquished traditional forms of individual privacy even as it spreads precariousness throughout the population. With roots in the teachings of such radical Latin American thinkers as Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal, participation and in particular participatory democracy now gains followers at a moment when traditional governing institutions are being dismantled, labor unions are in freefall, and when both the liberal public sphere and individual privacy have become the stuff of folklore. Freire and Boal sought to empower disenfranchised peasants and workers by teaching them to reject the perception that they were mere objects of authoritarian manipulation and instead embrace themselves as living subjects capable of shaping historical and political reality. By contrast networked capitalism has reinvented participation in the guise of the "prosumer": a de-politicized consumer who actively participate in the production of what he or she consumes (think of Nike's sports shoe platform where customers get to participate in customizing their running gear prior to purchase). Participatory prosumerism draws away from citizenship and larger conceptions of social organization to move towards individualized and DIY forms of collectivism. Commenting on this paradox as it relates to the sphere of culture Claire Bishop points out that "participatory art today stands without a relation to an existing political project" (Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p.284). Blake Stimson asserts something similar stating "artists once saw a place for themselves in state-derived collective formations... [today] the displacement of state power by market power that has been the hallmark and battle cry of neoliberalism is inextricable from artistic collectivism's own shift to "models of dispersal and discontinuity, federalism and flexibility." To this list we should add "participation" and "participatory art." (Blake Stimson citing Rem Koolhaas on the organization model Lagos, Nigeria in his paper "The Form of the Informal," *34 Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art* • 34 • Spring 2014.) The question that remains to be answered is whether or not participation and participatory art can serve to keep alive the ideal of a collective identity not grounded in market monetization until such time as change takes place. Or, if instead this concept is merely a performative rehearsal of liberation, which in the absence of a more expansive political project overlooks, as Stephen Wright insists, "what exactly is being performed." Wright, *Lexicon*, 16) — Participatory Art, Participatory Democracy.

"The subjectivities we are called upon to perform in our prosumer society, though they may appear subversive, are easily read by power. All too often, it seems, we perform our rebellion." (Wright, *Lexicon*, 48).

Dark Matter

Dark Matter, n. (appropriated terminology) in astrophysics this is an unknown type of non-reflective matter (and energy) that, in theory, accounts for some ninety-five percent of the universe, and whose gravitational mass stabilizes the five percent of the universe that we can see.

In art, it is the vast, aggregate of structurally necessary creative labor generated by the majority of artists who, while systematically underdeveloped, secretly stabilize the art world's symbolic and financial economy by actively reproducing its exclusionary hierarchies. By forming a clear, topographical boundary demarcating and highlighting the far smaller zone of successful artists and art institutions this "missing mass" not only plays a key, stabilizing role within the normalized art world, but it also directly props-up its asymmetrical economy through the purchase of art supplies, trade magazines, museum memberships, and increasingly compulsory service as interns (often unpaid), adjunct teachers (always underpaid), studio assistants, art fabricators and installers and so forth.

The principle difference between these two species of dark matter is that physicists have long attempted to discern what their mysterious missing mass consists of by making it the object of an extensive scientific search, whereas those who lay claim to the management and interpretation of art—the critics, historians, collectors, dealers, museums, curators, and arts administrators— fervently ignore this unseen accretion of creativity, which they depend upon, despite the fact that it remains directly in front of them both day in, and day out.

Authority, n. [ə'θôritē; ô'θär-]

1 a legitimating construct that permits the state to equip its constabulary with such regulatory instruments as truncheons, pepper spray, Tasers, hand-cuffs, tear gas, revolvers, shotguns, assault rifles, and armored vehicles.

2 the state of owning specialized knowledge, power or property, which may under certain circumstances be acquired through an act of tactical trespass from one field into another, as for example with interventionist art (see N. Thompson, "Trespassing Relevance"), or through a process of "upclassing" in which one "self-promotes" oneself up out of a lower social status by joining a loosely defined profession such as fine art (see Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography, A Middle-brow Art*, Stanford University Press, 1965, p 171).

3 the antithesis of "Participatory Democracy," "Leaderless, Leadership," and "Leaderless Resistance," the first of which is associated with Occupy Wall Street and the Zapatista movement, while the latter two are associated with such contemporary forms of collective organization as the Tea Party and Al Qaeda.

4 "Freedom is about the willingness of every single human being to cede to lawful authority a great deal of discretion about what you do and how you do it." – Rudolph Giuliani

5 "Nothing strengthens authority so much as silence." - Leonardo da Vinci

— Greg Sholette, 2015

For all of the definitions and additional readings and links please go to:

<http://www.veralistcenter.org/art-and-social-justice/>